

'Topping out' is apprentices' reward for hard work

Completing a lengthy course of study is always a major milestone in anyone's life. Five Western employees recently finished apprenticeships—also known by field crews as “topping” or “turning” out. **Shawn Giesler**, a Rocky Mountain Region electrician and three linemen, **Stefan Schildt**, from RM, **Robert Flores** and **Dave Horton** from Sierra Nevada Region and **Michael Strawn**, a meter and relay technician from Desert Southwest Region, now each enjoy journeyman status.

Giesler, who finished training in May, and Schildt, who finished in April, were recognized

for their achievement Tuesday in Cheyenne. Flores, who works in Elverta, and Horton, who works in Redding, finished training in April. Strawn, who works in Phoenix, completed his required hours in September 1998.

Each apprentice spent four years learning about his craft in great detail. After attending classes, reading books, studying training modules and learning on-the-job duties, they are more than a little pleased to reach journeyman classification.

The best part

Giesler spoke sincerely when he stated every part of the training was important to the final goal. But he was also quick to point out that the best part of the four-year program was actually learning the jobs hands-on. “All the training met my expectations, but the on-the-job part was the best,” Giesler said.

Horton said he was grateful for the opportunity to enter Western's apprentice lineman training four years ago. “I truly enjoyed the experience,” he said. “Thanks to everyone for his effort, dedication and patience.”

Much of the training took place at the now closed Montrose Craft Training Center, under the guidance of **Larry Romero**, **Mike Rumbaugh**, **Larry Foltz** and Cliff Closson, who is now retired. Of the four instructors, only Romero remains involved with the apprentice program. Apprentice program management transferred to the regions when the CTC closed last year.

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Stefan Schildt, a lineman from RM.



Above, Sierra Nevada Region linemen **David Horton** (left) and **Robert Flores** work on a transmission line. Right, **Shawn Giesler**, an electrician from RM.



Western's crafts training coordinator in CSO's Design office, Romero said Western offers four apprenticeship disciplines—electrician, lineman, meter and relay technician and communications technician. Although Western has always trained apprentices, the program was formalized with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers through the Department of Labor in the early 1990s.

Eight-step program

Included in the four-year program are eight steps to reach the journeyman level. Two steps are completed each year, with each step including 25 to 40 modules of supplemental training each apprentice. Regardless of discipline, takes classes in basic math and electrical theory. After that, apprentices branch out into courses and hands-on training geared specifically for their craft.

All apprentices eventually spend 7,008 hours in on-the-job training, many hours in book/module studying and 1,152 hours in

supplemental classroom training.

"My job is to travel to the regions and administer tests, do follow-up paper work, provide technical support to the apprentices and assist the regions and CSO with record keeping," Romero explained.

Duane Johnson, a Foreman II electrician in Cheyenne, said he had the pleasure of working with both Giesler and Schildt. "I've worked with both men and they are valuable assets to Western."

A foreman III lineman in Elverta and Flores' supervisor, **Larry McAllister** said with the education Flores received at the training center and from what he learned in the field, the new journeyman lineman will be "an asset to the profession and to Western."

Ross McFate, a foreman III lineman in Redding, believes Horton has received excellent training throughout the program. "His training has transformed him into a safe, conscientious and well-trained journeyman lineman."